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SUBJECT: Niger: 4th Anniversary of Pres. Tandja's 2nd Term;  
Supporters Call for Extension of Gov't Institutions

REF: A) Niamey 1066, B) Niamey 1111, C) Niamey 1173

¶1. Summary: Immediately after the festivities marking the 50th Anniversary of the Republic of Niger, the fourth anniversary of President Tandja's second term was celebrated on December 21. Traditionally a commemorative event, this year's celebration was transformed into a political rally, wherein Tandja supporters called for an extension of the President's term of office by three years. On December 23, Tandja supporters created the "People's Movement for the Pursuit of the President's Action" in order to press the National Assembly to approve a constitutional amendment that would allow this extension. These developments will probably exacerbate the controversy over the "Tazarce" (stay the course) movement, as civil society groups and the political opposition insistently call on the President to abide by his oath and comply with the term of office provided by the constitution (Ref B). End Summary.

¶2. In his address to the nation on December 17 (Ref C), President Tandja presented an overall positive track record of his term, calling on Nigeriens to "see that these assets be strengthened and that all those great construction projects...be completed." On December 20, the President met with all eight regional delegations that attended the Tillabery cultural and sports festival (Ref C), and thanked them for a job well done. On that occasion, a representative of Niger's traditional chiefs (some were present at the meeting) assured the President of their "total support in order to continue his work." On December 21, Pres. Tandja supporters organized a rally in which they praised the President's track record and asked for an extension of his term.

¶3. The Prime Minister, cabinet members, the heads of various government institutions, some political party leaders of the ruling coalition attended the 4th anniversary rally, chaired by a cabinet member. On behalf of the organizers of the rally, an advisor to the Prime Minister read the summary of a memorandum calling the establishment of a "political transition" that would allow President Tandja "to complete the great work he has undertaken" and "to bring a final solution" to the armed conflict in the north. Rally organizers also proposed "maintaining all government institutions until 2012" and the formation of a "national consensus government." They further called on the National Assembly to consider the various proposals during their next session.

¶4. Also present at the rally was the Vice President of Niger's Islamic Council, who read a statement applauding the President's record. On December 22, in an editorial regarding the rally, the head of the government communication unit said, "the people have spoken" and there should be "no debate" over the extension. The editorialist extended an invitation to the President, saying, "because you have never failed to deliver on the people's requests, we believe that you will also accept this call." (Note: The same made an editorial following the celebration of Niger's Independence last August hinting at support for an extension of the presidential term of office - Ref B. End Note.)

¶5. On December 23, the "People's Movement for the Pursuit of the President's Action" was created. In its manifesto, the movement announced its intention to submit to the National Assembly a

proposal to change the constitution. The movement said that if the National Assembly rejected the proposal, then it would ask the President to call a referendum.

¶6. Several organizations, political opposition representatives, and National Assembly members have expressed opposition to a "consensus government."

Iro Sani, spokesperson of the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS), said that the PNDS would respond if President Tandja declared he would seek a third term or an extension of his current mandate. PNDS Vice President and National Assembly member Bazoum Mohamed told the press that the National Assembly would never pass a request for a third presidential term and that the opposition would not accept participating in any "unity government." During a press conference on December 22, Nigerien Party for Self-Reliance (PNA) leader Sanoussi Jackou said that those who support the Tazarce move "have no respect for Niger's people, intellectuals, political parties, constitution and democracy." For Jackou, "this is dishonest. We do not want a free mandate. We want elections. PNA will not agree to this (expletive)." The Movement of Niger's People (MPN) said, "we are not animals. We are intelligent. Did not all former presidents do anything for the country? Did they ask an extension? Now we understand that the president is accomplice to this movement (Tazarce)."

¶7. Comment: Opposition leaders did not attend the December 21 rally. It remains to be seen how the Alliance of Forces for Democracy and the Republic (AFDR) - the majority coalition - will react to these events. Are all political parties accomplices to this move, as some critics claim? Do current events confirm former Prime Minister Hama's concerns when he was trying to explain his predicament? Observers were surprised that the President did not

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address the key issue of upcoming elections while the completion of the voter register (purposefully?) stalls - are there ulterior motives?

¶7. For some observers, the probability is high for these proposals to be passed by members of the National Assembly because an extension-transition of 3 years would benefit many of them who may not otherwise return to the National Assembly if elections were to be held in 2009. For other analysts, these events have rekindled the debate over an extension of the President's term, and if the situation is not well managed, it may open a period of political instability in Niger. End comment.

Allen